

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY // VOL. 100 NO. 8 FALL 2016



BIRDS BENEFIT FROM MULTIPLE RESTORATION SITES

BY ILANA DEBARE

Many Audubon chapters around the country have their own nature sanctuaries—land donated to them for preservation as wildlife habitat and for environmental education. Based in densely urban San Francisco and the East Bay, Golden Gate Audubon Society never had the good fortune of owning its own nature reserve. Instead, GGAS is proactive and collaborative—reaching out to restore land and lead nature education programs on a variety of public lands on both sides of the Bay.

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Wilson's Warbler at North Lake, one of Golden Gate Audubon's habitat restoration sites.
Photo: Christopher





Harbor seals rest on the new float suggested by Golden Gate Audubon.

ACTUALIZING HOPE

BY CINDY MARGULIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In conservation, challenges can seem daunting, even overwhelming. Yet the most important thing is to begin. Taking a single positive step lets anyone realize they can be of help in a meaningful way. Consider this issue's main story: The astonishing amount of habitat collectively restored when 2,500+ people last year joined Golden Gate Audubon Society in improving public lands so wildlife may thrive in the midst of our metropolis. These efforts helped enhance public lands for people too.

Another recent hopeful action benefitted a pod of lounging harbor seals in Alameda.

A development project was slated to remove an old derelict dock that was regularly used as a haulout by harbor seals—the only known harbor seal haulout for 25+ miles on the East Bay shoreline.

GGAS members added our voices on behalf of this local seal pod. We urged the City Council to require developers to create a replacement haulout. Just like birds' favored roosting areas, seal haulout sites are crucial for these shy marine mammals to rest, give birth, and warm themselves by getting out of the cold water.

By speaking up for these local seals and

proposing a feasible solution, we and our Alameda allies were able to keep this pod of seals along the East Bay shoreline. Alameda city officials agreed to require the developer to hire a harbor seal biologist to guide the design and placement of a suitable replacement haulout. We met with him and shared our concept for a floating platform to be towed in stages further from the commotion of construction and eventually anchored permanently where the seals would be safe nearby, enjoying quiet waters while still visible from the Bay Trail.

Already, it's been working! Within hours of removal of the old decrepit dock, seals were spotted lounging on their new concrete float. And not just seals! Water birds also flocked there to rest and preen. Alongside the seals, numerous species have been roosting: Brown Pelican, Double-Crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Snowy Egret, Black Oystercatcher, and, of course, gulls. It sure is a sign of hope to realize that anyone who cares can truly help local wildlife!

RENEW SOON FOR 2017

Watch your mailbox for a membership renew/join letter from us within the next month! GGAS memberships follow the calendar year, so we'll be asking you to renew now for 2017. This will be a particularly exciting year because of our Centennial celebrations, which will start in January and continue throughout the year. Please renew early to ensure you don't miss out.

NEWS BRIEFS

Partnership Saves 21 Herons

Over 150 pairs of Black-crowned Night-herons and Snowy Egrets nested in downtown Oakland this year. We partnered with International Bird Rescue and Oakland Zoo to rescue young herons that fell into the busy streets and saved the lives of 21 birds. Full story at goldengateaudubon.org/herons-2016.

Eco-Ed Nest Box Success

Our Eco-Education elementary school students in Richmond built nest boxes for nearby Wildcat Canyon park last spring...and seven out of the 12 were occupied! The boxes drew Western Bluebirds, Ash-throated Flycatchers, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens. For the full story and photos, see goldengateaudubon.org/eco-ed-nestboxes.

Golden Gate Birder Blog

Don't wait four months for your next *Gull* newsletter! Get Bay Area birding news and inspiration delivered to your email inbox each week through our blog, Golden Gate Birder. Stories on avian science, local birding hotspots, conservation issues, and more. Click on goldengateaudubon.org/follow to subscribe.

Water and Shorebird Class

Over one million shore and water birds visit or reside in the Bay Area each winter. Learn to identify them and understand their behavior in this four-week class, starting November 2 in Alameda. Weekend field trips included! Geared to beginning and intermediate birders. See goldengateaudubon.org/education/classes.



All photos by David Assmann

(Clockwise from left) Crissy Field lagoon in the early morning. Red-breasted Merganser at Crissy Lagoon. Red-shouldered Hawk at Crissy Lagoon.

CRISSY FIELD LAGOON: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY DAVID ASSMANN

LOCATION

Presidio
San Francisco

You can get fairly close to the birds without disturbing them.

Crissy Field Lagoon at dawn on a sunny day is the epitome of tranquility—herons and egrets feeding in a pristine lagoon with the Golden Gate Bridge perched majestically in the background. Seeing this birding jewel today, it can be hard to visualize its many previous incarnations as a military installation, a live-stock display area, and a hazardous waste dump.

Before the Spanish arrived in 1776, what is now Crissy Field and Lagoon was a 130-acre salt marsh and estuary. The Ohlone lived in seasonal camps, harvesting shellfish and fish from the marsh. The Spanish established a garrison called El Presidio, which became a U.S. military base in 1846.

The tidal sloughs were filled in 1912 so that the area could be used as a Grand Prix racetrack in advance of the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition. During the exhibition, the site of the lagoon was used for livestock exhibits for the fair. In 1921, an airfield was built on Crissy Field.

Over time, the Presidio gradually lost its utility as a military base. It was transferred to the National Park Service in 1994, and shortly thereafter the transforma-

tion back to a more natural state began. Golden Gate Audubon was one of the key environmental groups consulted in the environmental assessment for the restoration.

Today the 18-acre Crissy Field Lagoon provides a rich habitat for shorebirds, wading birds, and ducks. Summer is the slow season on the lagoon, but herons are almost always present and by late summer are bringing young to the lagoon. Four species of swallows can be seen hunting insects over the lagoon and field.

Fall brings a number of over-wintering species including five species of grebes. The grassy area west of the lagoon can have American Pipit, Say's Phoebe, and Western Meadowlarks as well as blackbirds.

I know rainy season is here when the ducks begin to arrive. Ruddy Ducks, Scaups, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Buffleheads join Common Goldeneyes and Hooded Mergansers to make the lagoon feel full.

One of the nice things about birding at Crissy Field is that surprising birds can show up at any time, although the best birds are usually found in the early morning. On a clear day, it's also a great place for bird photographers since you can get fairly close to birds without disturbing them.



Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact idebare@goldengateaudubon.org.

DYNAMIC DUO BRING THE WORLD'S BIRDS TO GGAS

BY ILANA DEBARE

Pat Kirkpatrick had recently retired from her job as a disability rights fundraiser when she heard about a volunteer position coordinating the “Travel with Golden Gate Audubon” program. “I thought it would be the ideal combination of my love of birds, travel, organizing, and people,” Pat said.

Later, as a participant in a GGAS birding trip to Newfoundland, she met Rubi Abrams—and found not just a new friend but a partner in managing the Travel program.

Rubi and Pat now put in countless hours each year seeking out the best national and international birding tours for GGAS members.

Pat says they look for trips “where the birds are spectacular and the cultural aspects are enticing as well.” Rubi adds that they seek out tour providers with a sterling reputation in the birding world, positive reviews from GGAS members, and professionally managed logistics.

“Most importantly,” she said, “we look for vendors who employ talented, professional ornithologists who know their stuff—guides who have done all the legwork of bird sightings and ID and, where possible, live and work in the region they are guiding.”



Birding in Cuba.

Debbie Sturdivant Jordan

The result of their diligent work is a smorgasbord of amazing trips! GGAS destinations in 2017 include Oaxaca (Mexico), Cuba, South Texas, Southern Arizona, Southern Oregon, and the Pacific Northwest. For dates and details, see goldengateaudubon.org/travel.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2017 IS COMING

This December marks the 117th annual Christmas Bird Count for National Audubon. Be part of the world’s longest-running citizen science project—and enjoy a great day of birding—by joining our Oakland or San Francisco counts!

Last year’s Oakland count found a total of 179 species and 96,287 individual birds. The San Francisco count found 184 species and 73,095 individual birds. In recent

years, the Oakland count has had more people counting in the field than any other CBC in the world!

Both beginning and experienced birders are warmly invited to join in the fun. One great way to prepare is through our fall birding classes, such as Water and Shore Birds, which starts on November 2. Learn more at goldengateaudubon.org/classes.

Want to participate but can’t spend the

day counting? Volunteer at the festive compilation dinner after each count! Or take part as a Feeder Watcher and count from the comfort of your home.

This year’s Oakland count is on **Sunday, December 18, 2016**. The San Francisco count date is **Tuesday, December 27, 2016**. Online registration opens in November. For details, see goldengateaudubon.org/cbc.



(From left) The 2016 CBC in San Francisco, and lunch break at Lake Temescal in Oakland (courtesy Ilana DeBare). Counting at Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline in Oakland (courtesy Rick Lewis).

RESTORATION CONTINUED from page 1

GGAS currently sponsors monthly habitat restoration activities at seven sites, from Golden Gate Park in San Francisco to Point Pinole in Richmond.

And it turns out that not being tethered to one single site has advantages. Our 2,600 annual volunteers can find a habitat work day nearby, no matter where they live. Similarly, there are diverse landscapes available for use as “outdoor classrooms” close to all of the elementary schools in our award-winning Eco-Education program.

Improving habitat in multiple spots allows us to support a wider variety of species, from threatened Snowy Plovers at Crissy Field to nesting Tree Swallows in Golden Gate Park.

Finally, working on a variety of public lands allows us to build strong, positive partnerships with numerous land management agencies—which pays off when a park district, port, or city has an issue involving birds or wildlife.

Current restoration sites include:

Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline (Oakland). GGAS works in cooperation with East Bay Regional Park District, the land management agency here, to remove trash and weeds and plant native plants. The area serves as an outdoor classroom for our Oakland Eco-Education students. This spot is particularly meaningful to GGAS since we fought to protect this estuarine shoreline for decades. Today it hosts a rich assortment of shorebirds, ducks, waders,



Lee Karney

GGAS work days always include some time to spot and learn about the local birds. Note the restored wetland section of Pier 94 behind these volunteers.

Today endangered Ridgway's Rails shelter in native plants planted by our Eco-Ed kids at Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline.

and grebes. Endangered Ridgway's Rails shelter in native plants planted by our Eco-Ed kids.

Pier 94 (San Francisco). The Port of San Francisco licensed and supports GGAS to restore this five-acre former dump site in Bayview/Hunter's Point. Since 2002, we've created a functioning wetland that now hosts Black Oystercatchers, American Avocets, Semi-palmated Plovers and wigeons. Many companies like Salesforce join us at Pier 94 for employee volunteer opportunities. Each work day includes time for a bird survey that is uploaded to eBird. So far we've documented 136 species at Pier 94 in 2016, up from just 87 before restoration.

Golden Gate Park: Bison Paddock. Along with weeding and planting under the supervision of park gardeners, we've installed 12 nest boxes for Western Bluebirds and Tree Swallows. White-crowned Sparrows nest in the native lupine bushes we planted.

Golden Gate Park: North Lake. Already a terrific birding spot, North Lake is getting even better thanks to restoration. GGAS member Alan Hopkins recommended plants to provide food and roosting habitat for birds and butterflies that rely on coastal scrub.

Alameda Wildlife Reserve. Working with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on this Veterans' Affairs site, GGAS prepares the area for the arrival of endangered Least Terns each spring and helps monitor this crucially important breeding colony.

Crissy Field (San Francisco). An outgrowth of our work monitoring Snowy Plovers at Crissy Field, our monthly beach clean-up focuses on micro-trash such as plastic and cigarette butts—dangerous debris that can doom birds and marine mammals.

Point Pinole Regional Shoreline (Richmond). Students from our Eco-Education program have planted more than 1,500 native upland plants to increase biodiversity. They're also installing nest boxes for kestrels and developing a bluebird trail.

GET INVOLVED!

Find an upcoming restoration event near you at goldengateaudubon.org/volunteer. Or email nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org. Donations help too! For \$1,000 a year, we could hire a restoration intern for the two Golden Gate Park sites who would oversee volunteers and help them spot and identify birds benefitting from their work.



Anthony DeCicco

Eco-Education students work together to plant native flora at Pier 94.

SPEAKER SERIES



"Tree ears" recording technique in Yosemite

Dan Dugan

CALIFORNIA SOUNDSCAPES

DAN DUGAN

LOCATION / DATE

Berkeley
Thursday, October 20
6:30 p.m. refreshments
7 p.m. program

Join us for a visual and auditory tour of 16 fascinating California soundscapes in surround sound. Dan Dugan will introduce you to the theory of soundscape analysis, demonstrate the difference between mono, stereo, and surround sound, and share a brief survey of the available equipment. Learn how our national parks are struggling with soundscape preservation, and how natural sounds are documented by nature sound recordists in two styles—species hunting and soundscape recording.

Dan Dugan, a technical mentor for the Nature Sounds Society, is best known as the inventor of the automatic microphone mixer. His products currently facilitate PBS NewsHour, ESPN sports commentary, and the presidential debates. Dugan has recorded surround sound in national parks including Muir Woods, Joshua Tree, and Yosemite. His recordings are submitted to the parks for scientific research. He has published six "relaxation CDs" of nature sounds and a full-length dawn chorus from Mariposa Grove in Yosemite with listeningearth.com.

EARLY BIRD RENEWAL

Renew your Golden Gate Audubon Society membership now for 2017! If you renew now, we won't need to mail you a year-end renewal letter, saving postage, time and trees. And if you're a member of National Audubon who has not yet joined Golden Gate Audubon, please do! Benefits include this quarterly Gull newsletter, free admission to our monthly Speaker Series, and discounts on birding classes and pelagic trips. And of course...being part of a community that has worked to protect Bay Area birds for the past 100 years.

Renew or join online at goldengateaudubon.org/join. If you join now, your membership will cover the rest of 2016 and all of 2017...our Centennial year.

A YEAR IN THE LIVES OF NORTH AMERICAN OWLS

PAUL BANNICK

Award-winning photographer Paul Bannick will share video, sound, stories from the field, and several dozen new images from his brand-new book: **Owl: A Year in the Lives of North American Owls.**

Witness the four seasons on territory, as each stage in an owl's life is chronicled through rare images: courtship, mating, and nesting in spring, fledging and feeding of young in summer, dispersal and gaining independence in fall, and, finally, winter's migrations and competitions for food. His program shows how owls use the unique resources available to them in each habitat to face those challenges.



San Francisco: First Unitarian Universalist Church and Center, 1187 Franklin Street (at Geary). Public transit, street parking, and parking in a lot for a fee are available. Directions: Visit www.uusf.org/visitors_faq.html, and use the Map It! link on the left.

Berkeley: Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda (between Solano and Marin). Directions: www.northbrae.org/directions.html.



2017 BAY AREA BIRDS PHOTO CALENDAR

Bring the beauty of Bay Area birds into your home or office every day with our **2017 Birds of the Bay Area** photo calendar! Enjoy stunning photos of hummingbirds, owls, shorebirds, woodpeckers, warblers, and more by dozens of the Bay Area's most talented wildlife photographers. Special edition marking GGAS's Centennial in 2017. Just \$20 plus tax, it makes a great holiday gift. View and order online at goldengateaudubon.org/calendar, or pick one up at our office.

DONATIONS

Thank you for your generous donations to support our many conservation, education, and member activities!

Donations from June 1, 2016 through August 31, 2016

GOLDEN EAGLE (\$1000 or more)

Helen McKenna & Allan Ridley, Mara Melandry, Karen Rosenbaum & Ben McClinton, Jill Weader O'Brien, Ann Williamson

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Alameda County Clean Water Program
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Flora Family Foundation
Jiji Foundation
Salesforce Foundation
The San Francisco Foundation



Allen's Hummingbird.

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THE GULL AND WEBSITE

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NORTHERN CALIFORNIA BIRD BOX

Report your unusual bird sightings: 415.681.7422

The Golden Gate Audubon Society was founded January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948. Golden Gate Audubon Supporting Membership is \$35 per year. Renewals should be sent to the Golden Gate Audubon office. The board of directors meets six times per year (schedule can be obtained from the office).

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www.goldengateaudubon.org

 The Gull is printed with soy-based inks on chlorine-free paper, 30% postconsumer waste content.

2 Harbor Seals Get Help

GGAS joined with Alameda seal lovers earlier this year to protect a valuable resting spot for harbor seals.

3 Birding Hotspot: Crissy Field Lagoon

This restored lagoon in the Presidio is a great place to find shorebirds, wading birds, and ducks.

4 Travel with GGAS in 2017

Two hard-working volunteers organize tours to top birding destinations like Oaxaca, Cuba, the Pacific Northwest, and Southern Arizona.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Bob Lewis

Cooper's Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk.

RAPTORS IN AUTUMN

BY EDDIE BARTLEY

Autumn is the season with the highest number of raptors in the northern hemisphere. This is particularly true in the Bay Area, where year-round residents are joined by millions of migrants, some of whom over-winter in our mild Mediterranean climate.

Many arrivals are first-year or “hatch year” birds. The largest increase of raptor sightings occurs along the coast in late September and early October when it can be raining young Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks (also known as accipiters, their scientific name) on maiden journeys seeking a good place to survive the winter. Of

nearly 20 raptor species seen here each fall, the next most common species are Red-tailed Hawks and Red-shouldered Hawks, both in the genus *Buteo*, and Turkey Vultures.

The best time and place to witness autumnal raptor movement is on a clear day at Hawk Hill in the Marin Headlands, but any high hill with a view will do as raptors disperse throughout the area.

As with all bird identification, the primary clues include size, shape, behavior (especially flight style), and sound.

Accipiters, for example, are thrush-to-crow-sized birds with very long tails and relatively short, rounded wings that provide incredible maneuverability in tight cover when hunting birds in their preferred arboreal habitat. These are the most likely hawks to be seen hunting around a backyard feeder. They have relatively choppy wing beats and seldom call in flight, but emanate a repeated “kek-kek-kek” sound when agitated or around their nest.

Buteos, on the other hand, are generally larger, with long, broad wings and short tails that are advantageous for soaring while hunting in open areas. Red-tailed Hawks are by far the most sighted buteo in the Bay Area, while the more arboreal Red-shouldered is more often heard than seen. (Thus its nickname of “Singing Hawk.”)

Long-distance migrants such as Swainson’s Hawk (a California breeder) and Broad-winged Hawks move through during fall but are mostly absent in winter.

Species have their own typical timing in fall migration. Ospreys, American Kestrels and Prairie Falcons tend to arrive in the Bay Area earlier than accipiters and Northern Harriers. White-tailed Kites appear mid-season, with northerly breeding buteos as well as most adult raptors appearing later in the season.